



Durbin, Duckworth Join Colleagues In Urging FCC To Prioritize Rural Broadband

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today joined Senators John Thune (R-SD), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and a bipartisan group of 44 other Senators in urging the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to prioritize sustainable rural broadband networks as the FCC considers new rules in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) proceeding.

“If our rural communities are to survive and flourish, our rural constituents need access to services that are on par with those in urban areas,” the Senators wrote. “By contrast, it would be an inefficient use of resources to promote services that cannot keep pace with consumer demand and the evolution of broadband in urban areas. As the FCC moves forward to adopt new rules in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund proceeding, we urge you to promote the deployment of networks that will be sustainable even as new advancements are made and are capable of delivering the best level of broadband access for the available USF budget for many years to come.”

Joining Durbin, Duckworth, Thune, and Klobuchar in sending the letter were Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), John Barrasso (R-WY), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Cory Booker (D-NJ), John Boozman (R-AR), Mike Braun (R-IN), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Bob Casey (D-PA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Tom Cotton (R-AR), Kevin Cramer (D-ND), Mike Crapo (R-ID), Steve Daines (R-MT), Mike Enzi (R-WY), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY), Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Josh Hawley (R-MO), John Hoeven (R-ND), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Ron Johnson (R-WI), Angus King (I-ME), Ed Markey (D-MA), Martha McSally (R-AZ), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Patty Murray (D-WA), David Perdue (R-GA), Gary Peters (D-MI), James Risch (R-ID),

Pat Roberts (R-KS), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Tina Smith (D-MN), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Tom Tillis (R-NC), Tom Udall (D-NM), and Todd Young (R-IN).

A copy of the letter can be found [here](#) and below:

December 9, 2019

Dear Chairman Pai:

As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) considers new rules in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund proceeding, we write to emphasize the importance of sustainable networks that meet the needs of consumers now and in the future.

Given that the FCC plays a critical role in connecting rural communities to high-speed internet through the universal service fund (USF), we encourage the FCC to make the most efficient and effective use of those funds. Any large-scale infrastructure project requires reasonable planning that takes account not only of current needs but also of projected demands over the life of the asset being funded; and the distribution of USF should be no different. For broadband specifically, this requires that networks, built using USF, must be capable of delivering speeds, latency, and usage capacity according to what the FCC deems necessary to meet the needs of consumers over the next decade.

If our rural communities are to survive and flourish, our rural constituents need access to services that are on par with those in urban areas. By contrast, it would be an inefficient use of resources to promote services that cannot keep pace with consumer demand and the evolution of broadband in urban areas. As the FCC moves forward to adopt new rules in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund proceeding, we urge you to promote the deployment of networks that will be sustainable even as new advancements are made and are capable of delivering the best level of broadband access for the available USF budget for many years to come.

Similarly, we believe it is important for the FCC to be responsible for USF resources and ensure that those parties receiving such support can deliver on the commitments they make. This requires monitoring and reporting once USF support is received to guarantee it is being used as intended. The FCC should also make sure before the auction occurs that the participants in the auction can successfully deliver on their promises. If a party is incapable of delivering broadband as promised, the American ratepayer loses twice over – first for having contributed sums that did not go toward the deployment of broadband as hoped, and then again for those ratepayers who reside in the area that ended up not receiving the promised service. It is therefore critical that any use of an auction to distribute USF support includes meaningful processes upfront to

prequalify bidders. This should apply to all bidders, regardless of the technology they propose to use or the performance levels they promise to deliver.

Thank you for your work to deploy reliable broadband networks in rural America. We look forward to working with you to help close the digital divide and provide rural American consumers with the same kinds of digital opportunities that many others take for granted.

Sincerely,